

Benito's Picture



E. M. Bannister
Section I

E.M. BARNISTER with sketch of earlier artists.

Goethe's celebrated trinity for the preservation of man's sense of the beautiful - "that he should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine painting every day of his life-" was probably generalized from the observation of a city throng; no where else in humanity's multitude do poems, music and the picture play so large a part in life. The eager surging around a blaring band, the eternal perennity of the rhyme of the street ditty, the unwaning popularity of the moving picture places and the illustrated penny prints each daily attests its power with the masses. Humanity indeed is one in these things. The difference between the masses and classes here is largely one in degrees - mainly a difference in the discrimination of taste between them; for in these as in the other divisions of art our taste is differentiated and advanced in the same proportion as we give studious concern.

Of the highest success in verse and musical composition yet achieved by the race, we have already spoken elsewhere in these pages. We come not to the subject of painting - the third and last division of the trinity in that division of art which some one has happily designated as "poetry without words;" With the colored race, painting, as with other peoples, is an art of slow growth and development. It has always been among the last of the arts to make its appearance; for we are told that "wherever in the world painting has flourished, it has done so after a period of development, gradually enriched by the accumulation of local or borrowed traditions, until at length it has blossomed into independent vigor." As the American blacks are just not but reaching a conscious independence in letters and the more materialistic forms of advancement, we must expect to find the art of painting more or less in its infancy with them. Slow and meagre, however, as has been the coming of colored painters, there have yet not been wanting examples of high proficiency with the brush and palette among them, and we are to summon to the witness stand those who have spoken most eloquently in this language. But let us first prelude these sketches with a roll-call at least of the minor artists whose work entitles them to be regarded as the pioneers in this field of endeavor. Jefferson had scarcely declared in all his imperious omniscience (N:V. Chap. Laws 1787) "Never yet could fix I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never seen even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture" before Jean P. Briessot de Worville, the noted French patriot, traveling in this country the following year (1788) wrote home from Philadelphia "I have seen a picture painted by a young negro who never had a master: it was surprisingly well done!" The Frenchman was sending his impressions of America in a series of letters to a friend, which were gathered into book-form later on under the title of "New Travels in the United States", and the mention of the painting was made with much other commendation in the letter on the colored people of Philadelphia. But history seems not to have preserved aught else to us of this youthful pioneer painter of his race not even his name. Neither the time nor

circumstances of the people or country were then congenial to painting of any kind save in its more practical forms. We may be assured however that if the young artist lived long enough his distinction was brought to the attention of the Pennsylvania Emancipation Society and through them to the parent organization in London. But time has dealt scarcely less gently with the records of these societies than with the memory of those whose names they were intended to preserve.

Though the name and productions of this pioneer painter have long since been lost to history the impetus which he gave to painting among Philadelphia colored people did not completely pass away; for even while Brissot was penning his reflections the child was already born who in the mature years of Robert Douglass, Jr. was to carry the art of the last painter to higher development. Robert Douglass, the painter was the brother of the noted Episcopal colored Episcopal minister clergyman of Philadelphia, the Rev. William Douglass, and flourished there during the second quarter of the 19th century. Mr. Douglass first achieved distinction as a painter of signs and other advertising ornaments much in demand in the earlier days of our country, and which required a higher degree of proficiency and skill than the custom of our day now bestows on the same class of work. So accomplished in fact did he become in the higher technique of his chosen vocation that Douglass easily passed from the class of work to that of portrait painter, and won no less success in the latter than in the former field. His place of business in Arch St. became in time the best known of its kind in Philadelphia, his skill being sought far and near by those in search of the best achievements in his profession. As early as 1833, the genius of Universal Emancipation said of him: "This young man the son of respectable colored gentleman in Philadelphia has for several years carried on the business of a sign and ornamental painting. His establishment is located at the corner of Arch and Front Sts. Few persons in our country if any, have greater proficiency in this line than he has shown for the time he has been engaged in the business. If some of our Southern sham philanthropists who insist on a transportation to Africa, to develop the faculties of genius in a colored man will visit the city of brotherly love, - where merit is recognized, whatever may be the garb it wears and examine his performances, they may profit by the information they can thus obtain. If they are unwilling to go to his "shop" they can see a specimen of his workmanship on a tavern sign, with a portrait of Napoleon opposite thereto, and in many other parts of the city they may upon inquiry see the evidence of his skill. He has latterly turned his attention to portrait painting in addition to his other employment. In this, too, he has been eminently successful. We have seen several of his paintings that would scarcely suffer in comparison with those who are considered among the best artists of our country. If genius and merit are deserving of reward we trust we shall be held excused for asking

the public's attention to the performance of this worthy and skillful young artist. (See Liberator March 23, 1833)

Writing in 1863 William Wells Brown said: " Many of the citizens of Boston, New York and Washington, Philadelphia and other cities of our country are often called to mention the names of their absent or departed friends, by looking upon their features as transferred to canvas by the pencil and brush of William H. Simpson, the young colored artist"- a saying which is equally true to-day. We have more than once had our attention called to the works of this artist in our peregrinations to the homes of old families in the various places visited for the facts here in compiled. Older residents of any of the foregoing cities will point out to you at the very mention of his name the faces of friends touched almost to life on canvas by William H. Simpson the artist. Simpson came out to Boston from Buffalo in 1854 with the family of the well known artist, Matthew Wilson. He had passed several years with that artist as an errand boy, before leaving the Western New York metropolis, going indeed directly to him from school. Simpson had however early laid the foundation for a good education in the Buffalo schools and upon this reared a splendid superstructure of information by constant reading in after years. In fact even while in school he showed far more interest in painting and sketching than he did in his books, and this artist Wilson was not slow in discovering. He therefore advanced the boy to an apprenticeship and took much pleasure in aiding the development of a genius that showed such promise with his pencil and brush. In fact even while in school he showed far more interest in painting and sketching than he did in his books, and this artist Wilson was not slow in discovering. He therefore advanced the boy to an apprenticeship and took much pleasure in aiding the development of a genius that showed such promise with his pencil and brush. The young painter opened up a studio of his own at 42 and 44 Court St. Boston in 1859 (See Liberator June 17, 1859) where, in spite of the race feeling of the day, he was patronized by many of the leading families of Boston and vicinity, for his mastery in portraiture. There went Charles Sumner in his day of glory at the suggestion of a friend who desired the statesman's likeness painted by the black artist, and in that little studio was painted A Sumner profile which was never excelled by those who in after years tried their prenticed hands. Another picture of equal merit by Mr. Simpson was that of John T. Milton, the well known antislavery worker and mason of long ago. This portrait painted by our artist and purchased by the Prince Hall Grand Lodge shortly after the death of Milton who died in 1865, now hangs in the Grand Lodge rooms in Boston. The Milton picture like that our artist painted of Charles Sumner, is said by all who knew both man, particularly by William Wells Brown, " was so correct" says the latter, " that he has often been employed to paint whole families where only one had been bargained for in the commencement. he is considered unapproachable in

juvenile faces." Simpson seldom aspired to other than the portrait branch of his art, yet one or two little fanciful sketches by his hand caused much comment in the art world in his day. This was especially true of his sketch of Sumner, "Crowned with the cycle and the wheaten-sheaf" which hung in his study. Simpson left Boston about the beginning of the seventies for Chicago where becoming involved in a love-affair he died the victim of his own hands in 1872. This young artist was of unmixed Negro blood rather undersized in stature and of somewhat mild and womanly countenance; he was of such commanding intelligence as to take part in all the movements for the advancement of his race in his day about Boston.

While Boston was rejoicing over the portrait painting of Simpson and Bannister's already forging to the front in these and his more successful landscape efforts, there came to Boston another painter in the person of Nelson A. Primus who in the end achieved success in this branch of art. Primus was of Connecticut origin, the son of Holdridge and Pattie Primus of Hartford, and made his appearance about Boston during the late eighties. He first came to notice hereabouts in the more practical art of carriage painter, being employed at one time in South Boston, and at another at 181 Summer St. East Boston. But his residence during much of the time of his Boston habitat was at 15 Berkeley St., and other places in the nearby suburbs of Somerville. Though nominally only a carriage painter Primus had larger ambition than the drudgery of the profession and manifested this ambition by both study and practice at every opportunity. Did some original work at first in portraiture but his taste seemed rather to run to copying, and his best efforts in this line was the reproduction of those great Biblical paintings, Munkacsy to noted Hungarian artist. Michael Munkacsy after a large experience with his brush in Vienna and other European cities, produced some between 1881 and '84 in Paris his celebrated canvasses, "Christ before Pilate" and "Christ on Calvary"; and took the art world by storm. These paintings at once became the talk of all Europe, and were carried from city to city on exhibition. They finally reached America and shown in New York and Boston in 1886 and '87. Primus was a constant visitor at the exhibition hall when Munkacsy's great paintings were exhibited in Boston, and became much impressed with them, especially with the artist's "Christ before Pilate". The religious grouping of the canvass with its general oriental atmosphere took absolute possession of his mind and from the time the picture went on exhibition he gave his nights and days to a reproduction of it. Our artist finished his copy of "Christ before Pilate" by the early nineties, and became himself a public exhibit or at several places and galleries about Boston. We ourselves sent to see it at the old Horticultural Hall in Tremont St. in the winter of 1891, where the great painting exhibited under subdued light amid loud claps of thunder and flashes of lightening left a lasting impression upon me. As the panoramic view of the Battle of Gettys-

burg was on exhibition in Boston about the same time, which like the original of "Christ before Pilate" was also by a foreign artist, the identity of the painter of the Horticultural Hall exhibit did not then impress itself upon our mind. It was not therefore till the Spring of 1894 when Primus's painting was again on public exhibition in the Jordan, Marsh Art Gallery (See announcement in Boston Herald, and Globe, April 1-8, 1894) that we learned definitely of the artist. We then had the pleasure of not only seeing the wonderful picture to better advantage but heard its merits explained by Mrs. Primus who in a lecture told of both the work and her husband's career as a painter. Nelson A. Primus was then well known as a painter being even then entered in the directory of Somerville where he lived as an artist, and continued thus to be known wherever he resided in the East. Several other creations of his pencil reached the Boston public during his residence in Somerville among them being some landscape sketches and portraits of well-known men. A portrait of Phillips Brooks belonging to this period of Primus's career is still to be seen in Boston, and is conceded by good judges to be the equal of any of that great preacher in existence. Primus accompanied by his wife, left Boston about the middle of the '90's to travel and exhibit his "Christ before Pilate" going into nearly all sections of the country. He

finally brought up in San Francisco where he opened a studio at 535 California St., and remained till the great earth quake destroyed both him and painting together with thousands of others in 1906. (See San Francisco Directory 1903-6) Munkossy's painting of " Christ before Pilate" as reproduced by Primus was a canvas of some 12 by 8 feet, with every detail happily wrought out. Both experts and others who had seen the original claimed for the copy a merit hardly second to the first painting.

As originally described this picture is a strong effort to present, as it might have happened, one of the most dramatic scenes in the life of Christ. With great audacity, the artist has painted the scene in the entirely modern spirit of naturalism, abandoning traditional sentiment. It illustrates the gospel according to Renan Christ as unglorified, a man of unusual but not even exceptional temperament, sustained by intensity of purpose, and belief in his destiny and mission through every ordeal - that is all. His type is not particularly fine or noble or even benevolent; he stands in bold relief against the other human types in the picture.

the picture because they are all strongly antagonistic not because of any divine or human majesty of presence. He is not the master of men, he is - what none else in the picture is - master of himself. x x x x x x x x x. In the vortex of human passions which whirls around this vivid and original Christ, there is no figure without its individuality. Munköcsy's Pilate is a Roman, a judge, a gentleman with a conscience, his merchant is the incarnation of stolid worldly prosperity, his Caiaphas is commanding and eloquent

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his nobles have an air of culture and breeding, his roughs are roughs indeed, each of those who may be called a secondary character with some personal shade of malevolence or envy or indifference or sheer brutality. The sea of fury is only broker by one little rock of sympathy in the shape of a woman and child effectively introduced in the background. As a mere study of humanity the picture is one of great variety and strength."

(Academy May 6, 1882)

Section 2

But these were all merely the intermittent bursts of a hidden stream that was to take its permanent rise in the more artistic and enduring achievements of Edward Mitchell Bannister of Providence in later years. The efforts of the earlier artists may be compared to the Trojan epic cycles of old which his profounder Homeric grasp was to round out into a more consummate Iliad of art.

It was to the little town of St. Andrews in New Brunswick just beyond the boundary of Maine in Canada, and some 60 miles Southwest of the city of St. John we are indebted for the birth of Edwin Mitchell Bannister; for in that little shipbuilding centre, still nestling on a headland jutting far down into Passamaquoddy Bay, but now a summer-resort for the pleasure-seekers, he was born in 1828 and there spent the earlier years of his life. All that has come to us of a definite nature respecting Bannister's early years is that his father died when the boy was only six years old, leaving him and an older brother to his widowed mother. Of this older brother we know little else except that report has it he came to Boston and engaged in the barber's business in later years. Tradition has it that the parents of these boys were of West Indian origin, though this idea may come from loose habit, quite common with us of referring to all colored people who have come from under the British flag as being West Indians, while the truth is many of them are of Canadian birth. From William Wells Brown's account of Bannister which was doubtless had of the painter himself, we learn farther that he enjoyed the advantage of a good school, reading much more than generally fell to the lot of the average boy of his class and condition. But drawing and painting appear to have been almost inherent talents with him. From his earliest years he took to sketching whatever was at hand, often boyishly drawing his own fellows or teachers with a ludicrous touch much to the amusement of all the other students. Thus he continued at school until the death of his mother deprived him of all protection, when he went to live with the family of the Hon. Harris Hatch a practicing attorney of some note in Saint Andrews. Mr. Hatch was a kindly disposed man owning a large estate in the immediate vicinity of St. Andrews where farming was carried on under home management. Here young Bannister went to pass the latter years of his minority, working on the farm as well as about the Hatch homestead. But he never forgot that his first love was painting and could not resist the temptation to be drawing and sketching at every opportunity. The results of his pen might be seen on the fences and barndoors or wherever else he could charcoal or crayon out rude likenesses of men or things about him. One or two family pictures and those in an illustrated copy of the Bible were often thus drawn upon and produced by the boy artist. Thus Edwin's success became in time the talk of the community, all had a word of praise for the cleverness of the young boy in the household of Harris Hatch.

But the outlook for painting or any other art was not very bright or encouraging in the little town of St. Andrews at that day. In small American communities in those pioneer days and even yet life was too stern a reality for people (in the language of old George I of England) to waste much time with "basting and bastry." There the painter equally with the poet may truly say of his productions:

"The heavy troubles, the bewildering care
That weighs us down who live and earn our bread,
These idle verses have no power to bear."

Our young artist, therefore, set out from St. Andrews to find some place more congenial to art, and reached, in his peregrinations Boston about 1848, some time near his eighteenth year. Here the young stranger determined to succeed began at the bottom of the ladder by doing whatever his hands found to do. We find him working now as a helper with a photographer, and now as a barber, in fact at anything from which he could derive the means of a livelihood, but never losing sight of his chief aim to be a painter. Though devoted religiously to his brush and palette in those early days our artist found time for other attractions in that day and time. He was possessed of splendid tenor voice and sang at different times in one or two of the church choirs, and was a leading member of the Attucks Quartet a musical organization about Boston during the middle fifties which had as members beside him George L. Ruffin and William H. Simpson, the portrait painter. The Attucks Club filled an important role on the programme of the first observation of the Boston Massacre, by the colored people on the 5th of March, 1857. The Liberator both immediately before and after that date makes particular mention of the Club. Bannister was also a member of the Histrionic Club, a dramatic organization composed of the moving spirits among Boston colored people at that time. It was the custom of that organization to give some dramatic selection in Boston and nearby places during the winter months for which the club and several of its members were often highly commended by contemporary papers. Thus "Love at sight" in 1857, and "The Indian's visit" in the following year made up of their repertoire, and on the programmes which have reached us, may still be read the names of William C. Nell, George L. Ruffin, W. H. Simpson Jacob R. Andrews and E. M. Bannister, all of whom attained to places of note in later years.

Among the other names of those who took part in these little productions which were mostly from the pen of William C. Nell, was that of Madam Christiana Cartem who filled a leading role on the programmes for several successive years. Belonging to the well-known Babcock family of Boston, she had much the appearance of an Indian, and usually played some such role on these occasions. But Madam Cartem became better known in later years as Mrs. Bannister, the wife of the painter, to whom she was probably married some time in the winter of 1858 as the name of the

Madame Christina Carteau on the programme, of the Histrionic Club for 1857, appears as Christina Bannister on that of the following year. She was then conducting a prosperous business at her ladies hair dressing parlors at 365 Washington St. where with her ne plus ultra fair vigor she was patronized by the most ~~in~~ fashionable of the city, and where ~~the members~~ of the Histrionic Club itself ~~were~~ went to rehearse their parts. Her parlors were in fact situated at two or more different places during her long business career in Boston, as her advertisement in the Liberator for March 9th, '15 and April 4th '56 or during almost every year about that time would show. But Madam Bannister had worth apart from her establishment, and art of hair-dressing; for she probably more than any other woman in the race had a right to a share in the credit of her husband's achievements. It was through her skilful management in business that he obtained the leisure and time necessary for laying his foundation in painting.

Among some of these advantages during the early years of his matrimony was the opportunity for some technical study in painting with Dr. William Rimmer, the noted anatomical art lecturer, and painter. The doctor had come on from Liverpool in 1868 and opened a school of art, conducted principally in the evenings at the rooms of the Lowell Institute, where he delivered at the same time his noted lectures before the patrons of the Institute. Bannister who like the doctor was a British subject and for that every reason, perhaps was all the more readily admitted to the school, spent some time in attendance during the evening. The doctor's lectures as well as more formal instruction had great weight in enlarging his views about painting and may be said in fact to have been all the training that the young painter ever had. Bannister's first successful effort or at least the first to attract general attention, was a painting called "Outward Bound", and represented a ship under full sail, just standing off for some distant port. For this picture Mr. Jacob A. Andrews, perhaps the oldest and most reliable gilder in the race and himself still a painter of much taste, made the frame? Both the artist and gilder were duely mentioned by the press of the day. The Liberator.

From this time on, or at least from the early seventies, our artists began to appear in the annual exhibit of the Boston Art Club, sending in ever and anon a painting during the next dozen years. Among some of his productions thus offered were: "A Landscape" in 1873; "Mount Tug", at Kellyville, N. H., in '77; "On Pawtuxett River", in '78; "Among the Pines," in '79; "At Smith's Palace", Narragansett, R. I. in '81 and "The Evening" in 1882. All these and others of equal merit though not named, followed the period of Bannister's study with Dr. Rimmer during the closing years of the sixties, and after he had in fact gone from Boston to reside in Providence about 1872. This change of residence coming at the time it did redounded greatly to our artist's advantage. There were then a very few artists in Providence, and those who

were there, could scarcely boast more than a local reputation and a name. Freed from the overshadowing influence of the Boston throng, Barnister's brush took unto itself wings for a loftier flight, and henceforth with his larger self-confidence he gave some of the best creations to an admiring world. Now began those days in which he

"Bade silent poetry the canvas warm,

The tuneful page with speaking pictures charm.

Here through out the remaining years of his life all those wonderful creations of his, such as "Under the Oaks" and "A New England Pasture", which he sent respectively to the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia in 1876, and to the Cotton Centennial Exposition at New Orleans in 1884-85, and the more than hundred others listed by the Providence Art Club, were given to the world. It would indeed require far more space than is at our disposal properly even to mention the works of Barnister during his thirty years of residence in Providence. It is enough to say that all the best work of his brush was achieved there. One or two of these must therefore serve for the whole. Particularly noteworthy was his success in "Under the Oaks" by reason of that painting's having won first medal at the Philadelphia Exhibition, and lifted him as it were from a local penumbra into the national limelight of his profession.

This great picture was painted and listed with the Massachusetts Art exhibits which were sent from Boston to the Centennial Exhibition in 1876, and bore no mark of distinction or identification other than the name of the artist. Only a few of the better informed even of the Massachusetts exhibitors knew the painter's identity. In the Art building therefore while all admired the picture none could give the identity of its creator, or had other thought than that he was of the regulation type. The painting caught from the first the eyes of the judges as well as those of the spectators. Accordingly when the day for bestowing the prizes came around "Under the Oaks" was unanimously granted the gold medal and this so pleased his friends that they hastily sent a telegram home to Barnister announcing the fact and advising him to come on to Philadelphia to receive the award in person. The artist accordingly repaired to Philadelphia and duly presented him before the art tribunal for the medal. The chairman seeing the colored man in the place set apart for successful artists, rather gruffly asked:

"What do you want?"

"I see" said Mr. Barnister, "that 'Under the Oaks' has drawn the first prize."

"Well, what of it?"

"I want to ask who gets the prize the painter or the one who buys the picture."

"I do not see in what way that concerns you, but to answer your question", continued the chairman, "it goes to the painter; why do you want to know?"

"Oh, nothing much," said our artist, "I am however, the painter of that picture."

At this last remark we are told that the embarrassed committee al-

most smothered Bannister with congratulation. From that day forward his reputation as one of America's leading painters was fully secured. "Under the Oaks" was sold immediately to Mr. John Duff of Boston for \$1500, who took it back to that city where it remained for a while on exhibition in Everett and Williams' studio during their exhibit. It was finally taken to the home of the purchaser in the Jamaica Plain District of the city, and after the death and dispersion of his household came in the end into the hands of the trustee and administrator, Judge George of the Boston probate Court, and is now held with other effects in trust in New York City. In size "Under the Oaks" was 48 by 78 inches. This celebrated painting is described in the artists Centennial Autograph as being a simple composition and picture quiet in color and low in tone, but with strong oppositions. The dark mass of a clump of great oak trees fills the middle of the picture, and is seen in silhouette against a light sky and the meadows beyond. Under the trees is a flock of sheep in the care of a shepherd and in the immediate foreground a pool of water. The general tone of the picture is gray

Our artist sent another painting to the New Orleans ^{Cotton} Centennial Exposition in 1884-5 which was agreeably commented upon by the press of the time, especially by race journals. The American Baptist of Louisville, Ky., (June 11, 1885) particularly warm in its praise of "A New England Pasture," the name of the production sent on that occasion. But for some reason, "probably because of the environments of the place of exhibit, such as the bitter and intense race feeling with which the whole atmosphere was surcharged there, the painting got little or no official recognition. Not even did it get regularly listed with the other American artists. It may have been from this cause that we find no more instances of exhibits being sent by Bannister from home. Thenceforward he seems to have confined the creations of his brush and palette to his own Providence, - even Boston - "his beloved Samos being the less esteemed" for exhibits. In truth, from the actual amount of work achieved and preserved to us after taking up residence, Providence may be regarded as the sole home of Bannister's working period. There all his great artistic triumphs which have given him a place among the master painters of our land were scored. For the hundred and more paintings brought at the "Edwin Mitchell Bannister Memorial Exhibition" which was held at the

Providence Art Club in May, following his death in January, 1901, every canvas except "His First Water Color" was the product of his brush after his taking up residence in Providence. All in fact of his pictures now in existence save the few of his earlier sketches during his Boston days belong to this period of his art.

Our artist occupied a studio at several different places in Providence during his earlier years in that city but finally opened up quarters in the building at Street where he remained throughout his professional career. Here in this building he found congenial spirits among brother artists and was enabled to breathe an atmosphere in every way suited to the plain living and high thinking so necessary for achievements of his emprise. And how well he succeeded, one has only to turn to the number of his paintings which have been listed, and which for his thirty years residence in Providence average more than three annually, to say nothing of those which have been lost to record.

Of painting in the higher technical sense of the word, the writer of this sketch can hardly claim competency to speak, and will not therefore hazard an opinion as to the merit of Bannister. Fortunate, however, for Edwin M. Bannister there was no lack of appreciation among competent judges in his own day and time. Contemporary artists even in his own city and building knew and admired his gifts as a painter. And chief among them was John N. Arnold of Providence, who for years occupied a studio, he tells us just across the hall from him and who in his weekly notes on art and artists contributed to the Providence Journal had ever and anon a word about Bannister. And among the very best of these ~~that~~ is the one written by Mr. Arnold on the occasion of the Bannister Exhibit in the Providence Art Club. But of this more anon.

Some years after settling in Providence, Mr. Bannister who had learned through his occasional exhibits at the Boston Art Club by having some special organization devoted to its interest, prevailed upon his brother artists in the Rhode Island metropolis to unite in an effort to form a painters club. He had, up to this time, though no longer a resident here, continued to depend upon the Boston Club to get the eye of the art-world, and that was both too humiliating and uncertain for the success of those ambitious souls who wished anything like an adequate chance for large display. Influenced by these and similar considerations, and by their own experience in the past, the Providence artists hastened to respond to Bannister's suggestions on the needs for an Art Club of their own. The result was, the Providence Art Club was formed, and was duly incorporated under the laws of Rhode Island on the 15th of April 1880 with the following names as charter-members

In addition to all artists the Club is permitted to carry a long list of lay members which has come to consist of many of the leading citizens of the City and State. From its very modest beginning the holdings of the corporation now run into the hundreds of thousands, and has constantly waiting a large roll of applicants eager for admittance to membership. The quaint old building with its odd bays and rather antiquated facade, there in Street suggests most anything else than the home of art. Yet here at the annual exhibits and on social occasions, one meets a larger cultivated gathering than on any other similar assemblage in the Rhode Island Capital. It was for the double purpose of commemorating his service as a founder and as a master painter that the great exhibit was held after his death. This magnificent display of Bannister's paintings took place at the Providence Art Club in the week of May 19th, 1901, and was known as the Edwin Michell Bannister Exhibition. There were more than 100 paintings of our artist alone on view during that week, borrowed by the committee for that purpose. That week at the Art Club proved such instructive as well as social occasion as Providence has seldom witnessed.

The honor to Bannister culminated in the placing of a most beautiful and appropriate monument to his memory by the Providence artists which attests more than anything else their high regard for his worth. The monument consists of a huge boulder of Rhode Island granite with a six foot base, rising to the height of ten feet and is happily inscribed on a bronze face with

Edwin M. Bannister- 1828, 1901

Erected by Artists and Friends."

This splendid memorial stands now over the artists grave in the Providence Cemetery and has been rendered even more conspicuous by its picture, with the artists grouped around; which was taken on the day of unveiling. There is probably not another instance where color was lost so completely in merit and achievement as in this of Bannister, and unstinted homage so freely paid to genius.

The final chapter in these Providence honors to the memory of the painter came in the form of a most appreciative estimate from the pen of John N. Arnold, art critic for the Providence Journal, and himself a painter of repute. The Arnold estimate was first published on the 19th of May 1901 and as it was mainly reproduced in his Rhode Island artists it may be accepted as the final judgment of history respecting him. Of our artist's merits as well as defects, Arnold said-

"Bannister from the first felt the impulse of the Barbizon school, and without imitating any one artist, his trend of and his sympathies were all in that direction. His aim, like theirs, was to give expression to breadth, color and atmosphere, without the dry detailed, formal composition that had heretofore dominated American art. George Innis was the first to break from the ar-

chaic conventionaliz of the old school. I well remember his early work which was full of the hard, labored detail popular at that period. Bannister from the first followed no master nor any school - nothing but his own instincts. he went to nature with a poet's feeling, skies, rocks, trees and distances were all absorbed and distilled through the alembic of his soul, and projected upon the canvas with a virile force and a poetic beauty that in time will place him in the front rank of American artists. The delicate pearly clouds, shepherded by the slow winds, the purple distances, the ledgy pool, and lichen-covered rocks, the rugged pastures never had a more loving, humble or reverent interpreter than he. he was his own severest critic. He felt his limitations which were purely technical, and when the fervor of inspiration was at its height the uncertain command of his material through which he strove to embody his ideal frequently annoyed and hampered him; and I have known him to obliterate in an hour the labor of weeks.

(Arnold in Providence Journal
May 19, 1901)

Thus had the modest painter grown in the estimation of both brother artists and laymen during his residence in Providence, nor had his rise been confined wholly to the impalpableness of words. Both Bannister and his wife had prospered space in worldly affairs after settling in Rhode Island. From the combined earnings of her hair-dressing business and his brush and palette, they had laid away a little something so as

" To husband out life's taper at the close
And keep the flame from wasting by repose."

They owned not only a comfortable home for their older years, but had some of the luxuries of life such as a Summer cottage, and a yacht upon which they voyaged in Narragansett Bay and neighboring waters. The last time the present writer saw the Bannisters was at Newport in the Summer of 1893 where the artist and his wife had come in their yacht to spend a few days at the house of the venerable George T. Downing. And the numerous paintings which he has left us with seaside names and suggestions speak

" Well for the sailor lad,
That he 'sailed' in his boat on the boay."

Mr. Bannister was a devoted member of the church and conscientious christian as many of his creations show, and attended religious services regularly when at home. It was in fact while on his knees at prayer in the Free-will Baptist Church that the dread messenger came for the painter in 1901.

Edward M. Bannister, like Thomas Robinson, was a native of Nova Scotia, having been born there in November, 1823. He came to Boston early in life, and learned to make solar prints, prospering so well that it gave him leisure to sketch and paint scenes around the city, which he succeeded in selling at moderate prices. He was soon installed as a full-fledged artist, having a studio of his own in the Studio Building. After a few years of success, he married Madame Carteaux, and came to Providence in 1870, taking a room next to Leavitt's in the Merchants Bank Building, remaining there a year or two. He then removed to the Woods Building, where he painted for more than a quarter of a century. In 1875 he painted a landscape called "Under the Oaks", which gained a medal at the Centennial exhibition in 1876. The reputation he gained by this honor kept him employed for many years, obtaining good prices for his work, but the reaction came, and his patronage fell off, leaving him discouraged and disheartened. With a mind clouded and bewildered, a hand that had lost its cunning, mentally and physically a wreck, he passed away in his beloved church, 1901.

I first became acquainted with him 40 years ago in Boston, through a mutual friend, who wished me to see him work, saying he felt there was a quality in his painting which indicated rare ability, although hampered somewhat by lack of experience and a hesitating technique. Our visit to the artist's room in the Studio Building, Tremont St. is among my most pleasant memories, and upon leaving I assured my friend he had made no mistake in his estimate of Bannister's work, for it bore the undoubted hall-mark of genius, an opinion which in all these years I have seen no reason to change. A few weeks after this interview, I met Bannister at the evening drawing school in the Lowell Institute, where a dozen or more young artists met to draw from the living model. We had prevailed upon the directors of that institution to allow us a room apart from the regular school and have a nude male model. In that group there were several who have made their mark in the art world, - Martin Milmore, the sculptor; William E. Norton, the marine painter, and Edwin Lord Weeks, the famous painter of East Indian figure subjects, who at one time had a studio with Bannister. All were friends of his; he had the same genial, kindly, courteous nature which followed him through life. Bannister from the first followed no master nor any school - nothing but his own instincts,

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